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The WHITE STONE

JOHN McGAW FOSTER

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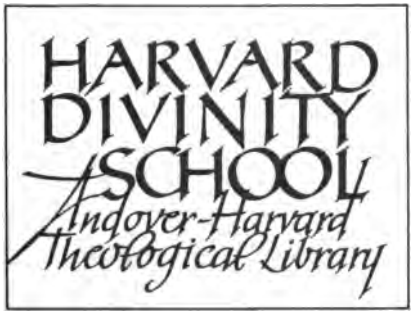
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The White Stone

The White Stone

Some Characteristics of the Christian Life

BY

JOHN McGAW FOSTER

RECTOR OF THE CHURCH
OF THE MESSIAH, BOSTON

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TO MY WIFE

In loving gratitude for her help and inspiration in the endeavour of the Christian life.

This little book is the outgrowth of a series of addresses given to the students of the Episcopal Theological School at Cambridge, during Lent, 1900. *The substance of them has been wrought into this form in the hope that it may reach and help others who are endeavouring to master the problems of the Christian life.*

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The White Stone

"And I will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it."

THE imagery of the Book of Revelation is the nearest possible expression, in terms of the senses, of spiritual experience. There are truths—and they are the great realities of life—which eye cannot see, or ear hear, or the heart of man conceive. No language can express those spiritual truths. The soul which has gained a glimpse of them may by word or suggestion convey some intelligence of them to another whose experience has been kindred. But when one who,

like St. John, has been "in the spirit" endeavours to describe these unseen facts to the mass of his fellow-creatures, the nearest approach to description must be delineation of the highest form of sensuous delight, leaving the reader's own spirit to bridge the gap which parts the sensuous from the spirit land. The picture of a city with streets of gold and walls of jasper and gates of pearl lifts the imagination to the purest height of which sense is capable, and yet it but crudely declares the meaning of the spirit's vision.

Such mode of expression serves also to awaken in the soul which is ready for it some vision of the land into which as yet it has not trod. He who follows St. John through his glowing descriptions may look onward into the mysteries. It is as if

the seer, taking us by the hand, had led us to the mountain top of sense-experience; and there, far above the commonplaces of earth, its scars concealed and its beauties spread beneath, had bidden us look onward still and behold infinite glories. And the power of that vision exists in the endowment of every child of God. Somewhere beneath the crust of the material and sensual burns the spark of spiritual development. Though smothered by the impending mass of grosser things, it is persistent still, ready to burst into flame at the breath of the Holy Spirit.

With such conception of the purpose of glowing figure to express spiritual truth we accept St. John's metaphor of the white stone as representing the goal towards which the Christian life is striving. It is one of

the rewards which are given "to him that overcometh." The figure suggests many things to us. The white stone with a name written in it recalls some of the marvels of the world's architecture, such as the Taj Mahal, a structure of snowy white, in which the only ornament, apart from the carving of the pure marble itself, consists of texts of the Koran wrought in letters of graceful form. Or the "white" stone may be the colourless stone, like the diamond, whose beauty lies in its transparent purity. But the white marble of architecture and the glistening precious jewel possess in common certain qualities which suggest to us their kindred characteristics in the spiritual life. They are pure and beautiful; they are strong and enduring. Without these qualities they could not be of the highest perfection

and value. And the like qualities of purity, beauty, strength, and endurance are the essence of perfect human character. The gift of the white stone to him that overcometh is St. John's glowing symbol of the complete character which stands as the reward of our earthly endeavour. For it is essential that we bear in mind the meaning of the heaven which is the crown of a Christian life. The analogy of spiritual striving and reward with that of our lower exertions and the rewards, unfit and often grotesque, which are offered for them, is apt to lead astray our conception of the heavenly life and its relation to our efforts here on earth. The Moslem dreams of a sensuous Paradise which shall yield to the full those delights which have been rare and fleeting here. The more rigid the discipline on earth, the greater and

freer the joys hereafter. Amid the trials of life's labours, it is very natural to long for eternal repose; and the thought of that "rest which remaineth for the people of God" becomes the chief of our hopes for the life eternal. But the great divine law of development—the fundamental rule of all God's creation—confronts us with its logic and demonstrates to us the inconsistency of such imaginings. The peace and rest of heaven are to come, not from cessation of activity, but from harmony in activity. If heaven is that estate where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest, the one condition presupposes the other. That labour only is wearying which is hampered and inharmonious. There are many forms of physical and mental activity which are in themselves a delight, and the weari-

ness which results therefrom is close akin to the pleasurable. It is a joy for the strong swimmer to battle with the current, and for the mountaineer to strain nerve and muscle in his endeavour to gain an untrodden summit. The artist knows no keener thrill of pleasure than comes with his laborious struggle to represent his dreams of beauty or faithfully to portray nature. Without such struggle as this, progress is impossible. The whole history of the evolution of divine creation is the tale of that gradual winning of mastery over one function after another till they become in the normal state automatic and harmonious and therefore tireless. We may cite the beating of the heart, the drawing of the breath, the reflex action of nerve centres as instances of functions which at some immeasurably remote

past called for strenuous exertion to establish, but have been mastered and laid aside. Familiar instances in the individual mental department of our natures are the mastering of speech and of letters. And the great final effort of the evolutionary process is to establish a like order in the spiritual realm. To-day, in our present stage of development, we struggle to obtain control over our passions and impulses; to master those temptations which assail us. In most instances such mastery means a definite struggle; yet in isolated cases we are conscious that our impulses tend towards the right, and to do and think aright has become instinctive. And when after the struggle has come the mastery; when our impulses move us along the workings of God's law, and we find all our instincts answering in harmony

to his will, then heaven is ours. In other words, this final effort of creative force is the evolution of character. And heaven is character established.

Such is the "gift" of the white stone. The laurel wreath of the victorious athlete is but the symbolic recognition of his prowess. It indicates to all who behold it his mastery over his bodily forces and endowments which made him the superior of his rivals in the race, and which are in themselves his real reward. And, since heaven itself is the condition of having attained, the white stone symbolises the completed character, which through eternity crystallises into unalterable stability those elements which in their germ exist in our earthly strivings. No other reward could be adequate. It is no glory for the thorn to bring forth

grapes or the thistle, figs. Fit reward is the crown of endeavour. And the white stone of purity, beauty, strength, and endurance can be given only to those characters which are by their endeavours to-day evolving those elements which shall unite in their crystallised completeness in the life eternal. It is our duty to ask whether those character elements exist in us, and what means we can find to aid us in their evolution and growth. Some suggestion of these helps is the purpose of the chapters which follow. Among many others, faith and prayer, knowledge, individuality, and consecration are characteristics of that Christian life which is developing into the pure, the beautiful, the strong and enduring. By exercise in these things we are winning that mastery which is to make their spontaneous exertion

by and by the joy and crown of our heavenly life.

These suggestions are meant to be practical. But to be practical is not necessarily to be specific. The experience of one soul can be a guide for the footsteps of another; it cannot be the prototype of that other's experience. Out from the depths of a common truth each soul draws its own nourishment; out from a common experience each gains its own guidance. Such is the symbolism of the "new name which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it." Each personal experience, leaving its own stamp upon the character, is known only to him who claims it—and to God. The specific details of that experience we cannot share with others; its grand sweeping lines are our common heritage. Along those lines we

are together building the white stone of perfected humanity; each one of us is crystallising his own life's course into the mystic writing of the new name.

Faith

ONE day—it was among the busiest and most distracting of the Master's life—Jesus was passing along the street of Capernaum amid an eager and curious throng. From the feast in the house of Matthew He had been called to bear His touch of healing to the little daughter of Jairus, who lay at the point of death. But the multitudes who had pressed so close upon Him that even in the early morning He had fled from them across the lake, would scarcely now permit His passing swiftly enough to satisfy the anguished father's heart. Crushing and thronging to gain a glimpse of the

Wonder-Worker, they blocked His way and hindered His step.

Suddenly, Jesus turned and asked, "Who touched me?" Amid the indiscriminate pressure there had been one light touch, which was fraught with a quality so subtle that it awoke the divine recognition and called into response the Christ's healing power. That quality was faith. A suffering woman, making her way amid the crowds, touched but the hem of His garment. The touch was faith; the answer, restoration.

No one out of the many incidents of Jesus' ministry could better illustrate this primal characteristic of the Christian life,—that distinct, active quality of the soul called by a name often perverted or starved out of its true meaning by convention or prejudice—faith. It needs no relapse

into cant phrase to aver that Jesus passes still amid the throng, and that faith is the active threading of our way through that throng to touch His garment's hem. For it is but saying in a figure the truth that the perfect Ideal has been made manifest to the world, not as a dreamer's vision but as a living personality. The world has always dreamed its ideals; only once has it seen the ideal embodied in the Perfect Life. That is the challenge which Christianity may throw at the feet of any system of religion which human aspiration after the divine has brought forth. It is idle to assert that this aspiration is other than God's spirit labouring in the human heart, moving on the face of the waters; it is a blind defence of Christianity to shut the eyes to the fact that there are marked likenesses

between the dreams of Plato, the precepts of Buddha, and the golden rules of Christ. But Plato's lofty idealisings remain but the baseless fabric of a vision; and the worship of the Buddha is merely the deification of the dreamer himself. Christianity points to the historic life of Jesus and says, "Behold the pattern of the Perfect Life." It points to His precepts and says, "Behold the rules which govern this life." And it points to the unbroken union with God which Christ always asserted and says, "Behold the power which, working according to these rules, creates the perfect life." Power, precept, pattern—there only is the complete revelation. The force which creates, the law by which it creates, the example of its finished creation—such is Christ's redemptive work in the world.

We can imagine the inventor of the electric telegraph calling around him his friends and, having shown the models of his instruments, explaining to them how the force of electricity, moving according to the laws which control it, would through his apparatus transmit the spark bearing the thoughts of men across vast spaces. And the listeners in friendly incredulity might answer, "How can we know this? We believe in the existence of this force; the laws of its action seem fairly well defined; your models are cleverly devised; and yet how can we know that they will act as you expect?" But when from city to city flashed the historic message, "What hath God wrought?" there was the consummation of force, law, and example which moved civilisation a step onward. Other reli-

gions than that of the Christ have grasped at the power of the indwelling spirit; have formulated the laws of His working. In the Christ alone theories are realised in manifestation. This and this only is salvation through Him. To hold before us the pattern of the perfect life revealed in Him; to grasp the same divine power which made Him perfect, and suffer it to work in us according to the laws by which it wrought in Him, till it transform us into some measure of His likeness—thus and thus only are we saved through Christ.

To this end faith is essential. The Christ passes by—the living model of our salvation. To win salvation we must press through the throng and touch His garment's hem. We can imagine that among those who crowded the way that day in Caper-

naum to look at Jesus passing by, there were many who needed the healing touch quite as much as the poor woman who received it. Sitting by the wayside, crouching in the dust, bending over their staffs, were the scores of maimed and crippled beggars who throng an Oriental highway. They saw the Christ passing before them; they were in His presence; but they were not healed. Nor was it from any lack of faith, if we use that word in its conventional sense of belief. Along the line the word had gone, "The Wonder-Worker comes; it is the Messiah long expected." And taking up the cry, the sick and the lame along the road would add their hosannas, and wonder if the Messiah's presence would bring them relief. Their hearts were easily credulous. They believed that

the Messiah was to come; they knew that this Jesus had wrought miracles of healing; they saw Him pass; yet among them all only one woman actively and persistently pressed forward into actual contact with the divine presence.

Here is the difference between faith in its passive sense and faith that restores and saves. We may in all assurance believe that the passing of Christ is the salvation of the world, yet we are not saved thereby. For the faith that saves is no passive relying upon any facts or established propositions; it is the development of a spiritual faculty which can grow in us only by its active and often painful exertion. Naturalists tell us that the organs of sight among the lower orders of invertebrates are developed only enough to bear to the creature

the sense of light and darkness, of substance and space. The caterpillar can see an obstacle in its pathway and turn aside therefrom; it cannot distinguish gradations of form and shades of colour or measure distance through perspective. It is a far cry from rudimentary vision such as this to the perfected eye. The development could have been attained only by the millions of birth-pangs of nature's evolutionary process winning each step onward by unflinching conflict. And it is a far cry from the blind faith which, groping in the darkness, yet makes persistent effort to peer through the cloud towards the brightness beyond, to the perfect vision of the pure in heart who see God. We may believe that in the lower grades of evolution the ascending forces of nature—which is but an-

other name of God—wrought out the growth unconsciously to the creature in whom it was manifested. But in the higher stages it is given to man consciously to develop the spiritual faculty till it is able actually to lay hold on eternal life. Salvation by faith is the development—the evolution, if you will—of this higher faculty. It is rudimentary in us to-day; but its germ is there, and little by little, its unflinching exertion, which is what we call faith, will bring it to its strength and perfection. We realise therefore the infinite wisdom of God in that He has made to us no revelation of Himself which we can perceive without the exercise of this faculty. He passes before us in the Christ; yet without the spiritual faculty we cannot behold Him. With the powers already established we see

only perfect manhood; with the developing spiritual faculty we see God in Him manifest. And since God Himself is spirit, only those perceptive faculties in us which are of like nature with Him are able to behold Him. To see and know Him we must quicken this highest sense of spiritual perception; it can be quickened only by strenuous exercise; and that exercise—that endeavour of the spiritual sense to peer into hidden realities—is faith.

It becomes evident, then, how we fail to attain the end of our salvation if instead of the faith which is strenuous spiritual endeavour we substitute the faith which is but assent to creeds and decrees. It will be our purpose in a later chapter to consider the usefulness of these things in the real and essential part which they play in the Christian

life. But the passing Christ heals us not, if, instead of touching His garment, we sit by the wayside and shout, "I believe." It is an interesting, and, so far as it goes, a healthful, exercise to compare His form and visage with the words which the prophets have spoken of Him, and find proofs of His Messiahship in the correspondence which they bear. But orthodoxy is not salvation; it is but the vantage-ground from which the soul may leap to life. Beware lest we mistake the vantage-ground for the goal. For then the soul either relapses into that indolence and lethargy which renders it incapable of the endeavour which transforms, or else, instinctively conscious that its striving is not ended, busies itself with those bickerings and controversies which rend asunder the robe of the Christ. Did the loiterer by the way-

side call to sharp account his neighbour who doubted that the Prophet of Galilee was the foretold Messiah? Was he ready to bring to bear a wealth of quotation from the holy writings to prove that the Long Expected had come? Did he, in serene complacence, assure himself that, whatever others, even the learned Scribe might declare, he had seen the Christ, and, having known Him, was saved with the true Israelites who should behold Him in power and glory? We may easily believe it, if our fancy fills in the gaps in the Gospel story. And yet believer and sceptic have passed away, and out from the oblivion stands only the humble figure of the woman who pressed her way amid applauders and contenders, and in living, active faith laid hold upon His garment.

Prayer

IN the soul's upward struggle of faith, prayer is its handmaiden. Indeed, so to define it far too meagrely characterises the sort of service which it renders.

The developments of modern civilisation have made us familiar with the sight of nature's grandest forces able to destroy man, yet trained to serve his bidding. So prayer is the mightiest of all powers, which, if we know the laws that govern it, becomes our ally in gaining spiritual heights. But its efficacy extends not only from the human soul upward; it radiates from God Himself and is in its inception not the staff which supports the trem-

bling child of God, as it is the instrument by which the divine life enters into the world.

In a tiny room in some great central railway station a man sits before a clicking telegraph key. From that keyboard wires extend to every part of the vast system of rails on which hundreds of trains daily move. Across the wires come tidings from the speeding trains, and over them in return are flashed the instructions which order their action and secure the safety of the lives they bear. The telegraph system of the line is the extension of the thought of the train-despatcher through which his human mind, fettered by no limitations of place or time, is able to be the ruling spirit of the railway's traffic in its ceaseless life. It is a crude example to us of the means which God has ordained to

establish His omnipresence—His immanence—in the souls of His children, as He is immanent in His material world. As the thought speeds far along the flashing wire, so the central mind of God extends itself and becomes the ruling life of the spirits of men, through prayer. It is necessary to our understanding of prayer, and our proper employment of it, that we so readjust our view point as to take in its relation to divine as well as to human needs. We rarely think of prayer save as an aid to the gaining or furtherance of our selfish desires. Self clouds its meaning—the self which circles around our individual consciousness, whether that be a consciousness of material or spiritual needs. Perhaps self-consciousness is inseparable from our primitive understanding of it. As the childish con-

ception of moral right scarce reaches beyond the idea of obedience to precept, so the early conception of prayer centres itself around the thought of petition. It may be petition for a gift or for success in the endeavour on which we have set our heart. It may be the anguished clamour for the life of some dear one which we fear is passing from us. Perhaps it is, "Give me, O Lord, the grace to know and serve Thee better." Perchance, "Touch with Thy grace the hardened heart of this one whom I love." In every case, though such prayers move in a constantly rising scale from the coarse begging for sordid things to the spiritual craving for the better life of another, still the essential thought is petition; and petition must ever centre around the self of humanity. At its best, petition is the stepping stone to

higher things. But in Jacob's vision, the ladder which reached to Heaven was not merely the means of ascent for the messengers of his thought or desire to mount upward toward God, but over it there came descending the angel messengers of Jehovah Himself. And until we realise that reciprocity of purpose, we cannot with freedom launch ourselves on the wondrous channels of communication between the divine and the human.

We stand by the river's bank, where the flood flings itself impetuously over the brink into the chasm below. "What power," we say, "is in that rushing stream!" And men have employed that power, chaining it and training it, to turn the wheels of their busy factories. The stream is a constant source of power for the activities of civilised life. But follow that current upwards

above the whirling eddies as they hasten towards the cataract; above the long, quiet reaches and reedy shallows; up where the stream, narrowed between grassy banks, finds its way forth from the waters of the lake. Then we see that it has another meaning than to be the bearer of power to the villages of men below. It is the outlet for those waters which rise from hidden springs and beat themselves against the bounds of the lake.

And if we regard prayer as the mode of communion between man and God, the analogy of the stream will teach us that the more we make use of it, not only are we bearing power to our own souls, but are doing God service. For with every prayer we deepen and free from obstruction the channels for the outpouring of the infinite soul of God, which is ever

seeking new means of expression of its divine life and love.

Our prayer, then, is a necessity to God. Like all His creation, it is ordained out of the demands of His nature. And when we pray, we are fulfilling our part as allies of the divine. The failure to realise this is but another manifestation of the self-centring tendency of all our religious thought. "I need Thee every hour," is the first, too often the supreme, cry of the human soul to its Father. "Thou art my guide and my helper." But how often, after this sense of humble dependence is established, do we rise to the realisation of the complementary truth, "Thou needest me"? Rarely do we go even so far as the wondering cry of the Baptist in the wilderness: "I have need to be baptised of Thee, and comest Thou to me?" And yet the

Christ's answer to him was, "Suffer it to be so now." "Thou dost not understand," he seems to say, "how I can need Thee. Yet so it is, for so hath God ordained." And so it is to us if our religion is to be aught more than selfish. First, my need of God. Lastly and supreme, God's need of me. It is no vainglorious thought. It is the deeply humble sense of the infinite responsibility which it is to be the child of God. For the Eternal Father did not create us to be puppets, responding only to caprices of the divine pleasure. Such creatures might indeed manifest the divine power; they could not be projectors of the divine life. Therein lies the mystery of our free wills. Endowed and commissioned to coöperate in the divine expansion, we are, as it were, God's colonists, carrying on in our own way

that which we gain from Him, the life and inspiration to achieve. And that this life and inspiration may continue in unstinted flow, the channel for its conveyance must be kept free and open. That channel is prayer.

With a thought such as this, with a conception not only of our own privileges, but of our birthright and our responsibility, shall we not become men of prayer? Shall we not "pray without ceasing"? If we realise that every thought and word of prayer, however simple or faltering, is a veritable, definite aid to God Himself, how can we shrink from granting it? When He depends on us, shall we fail Him? And, after all, to pray ceaselessly is but the following out of the real tendency which we call instinct. The prayer-wheel of the Buddhist, the curling incense and ever-burning sanc-

tuary lamp of the Christian ritualist, are emblems of the instinctive ideal of unbroken intercourse between man and God. They have indeed degenerated till spirit is lost in emblem. But when the smoke of the censer becomes the incense of the soul, the communion which God ordained becomes established. The habit of life for which these symbols stand, that which is ordained by Christ's own precept, "Watch ye, therefore, and pray always," and its apostolic echo: "Pray without ceasing," is the habit which refers to the divine ruling not only every cherished wish, but every plan and purpose, each success and failure, all joys and sorrows in life's course. The prayerful soul is not that alone which has learned to bend the knee in earnest entreaty in life's crises, nor that only which renders thanks for life's

signal blessings. It is that which has learned so to keep in touch with God, so to hold clear and free the channels of intercommunication with Him that every intention involuntarily turns to Him for guidance, and every outcome renders back to Him its glad acknowledgment. The polished speech of the orator has little likeness to the child's elemental stammerings; it has long since become their master. The educated writer pauses not to recall his schoolday rules of spelling and grammar. Practice and use have made these things the foundation stones of higher attainment; the mind unconsciously employs as its servants those methods which in childhood's days were the goal of its endeavour. So, to the soul which has learned to pray, petitions and thanksgivings are but the elements of prayer itself. In the

glorious seventeenth chapter of St. John's Gospel is recorded for us the model prayer of the master soul, the soul which had learned to pray. Supplication and thanksgiving are in that supreme prayer of Jesus, but they form no considerable portion of the whole. It consists of His life's plans and achievements, its hopes and fruitions laid before His Father. And in its triumph song rings out the declaration of unity with the Father which is the nature and end of all prayer. "I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one."

Such prayer should be the ideal of every Christian. It alone is prayer in its true, complete sense. But it comes not without long and strenuous exertion. The instinct to pray no more indicates the prayerful life than the musical ear denotes the accomplished

musician. Both are but foundations on which unremitting endeavour erects mastery. As the pianist day after day sounds forth upon his instrument the changes of his scales and finger exercises, so the master Christian breathes his daily petitions and thanksgivings, not as constituting in themselves the prayer which God enjoins, but as the ceaseless exercise which enables the soul to sound celestial harmonies.

To pray without ceasing, then, is a precept which bears to us a twofold significance. It means, first, in a sense not entirely literal, that we are to exercise ourselves by regular, oft recurring practice of devotion. Such is the motive of the daily prayer of individual or family; of the simple grace before meat; of the stated public service. These things must not be neglected lest our God-given power to

pray droop and die. They may often be perfunctory; many times but formal; yet even then they are not to be despised or remitted. In our modern life of haste and worry, we pass them by and have no place for them, but we do so at our peril. The spiritual faculties, no less than the physical, must be kept strong and active by recurring exertion, oftentimes arduous, yet which, persisted in, resolves itself into the unconscious necessity of habit.

Secondly, to pray without ceasing signifies to us in a sense, both literal and ideal, the constant intercourse with the divine which the soul trained through its exercise of devotion has learned to hold. Across the face of the harp, its strings tuned in accord, sweeps the summer wind, waking to life an answering song. That is prayer; so to keep in tune every motive, every

aspiration, every endeavour, every fruition, that the Spirit of God moving across the soul, wakens to life a harmony of response which, like the angels' song, ceases not day and night in its echo of infinite Love.

And, finally, in this very echo of heaven's melody lies the solution of the mystery of prayer's answer. Is our prayer heard; are our petitions answered? Such is the wondering, doubting question of every child of God. But, after all, prayer itself is the answer to a divine summons. He who breathes supplication or thanksgiving, in the crudest form of prayer, is himself answering the divine call which sounds in his soul and bids him hold free and open the channels of communion with God. And more and more as that harmony becomes established, every impulse of

the soul must be the expression of the divine inspiration, and no desire of the soul can fail of its answer because none can be aught else than the echo of the will of God from whom cometh every good and perfect gift.

Knowledge

"THOU shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them." Thus, strong and clear and definite, rings out the trumpet Voice from Sinai. It is the divine decree against idolatry, and although we fancy that idolatry is a sin which, save in a metaphorical sense, has been left behind in the progress of religious life, yet the Commandment against graven images and false gods is applicable to every age. For idolatry

springs out of the instinct, implanted by heaven in the human heart, to worship. Deny it as man may, those souls are rare who do not long to yield homage to some deity, some being of superior wisdom and might. There are many instances, indeed, in which the divinity is none other than the soul's self. Self claims our worship and receives homage in its strongest form, the bending of every energy and the sacrifice of all else in the attainment of our selfish desires. But such lowering of deity is not normal. The natural desire of the human soul is to go out with straining impulse towards a higher Power. Only through the incentive of worship can progress become possible, and mankind advance towards the perfect. A child's play is the instinctive worship of the achievements of manhood, while yet

in the childish heart lies the consciousness that the man's power is greater than his own. Through that worship, with increasing strength the child comes at last to attain in his time the crown of man's estate.

Dimly and from afar, with the consciousness that, not yet having attained we follow after, man worships the divine. Children of God, it doth not yet appear what we shall be. All that we know is that when He who is the object of our worship shall appear, we shall be like Him. Thus upward and onward, through worship of the Superior, we grow into the greater life. Through adoration of the Infinite, finite man moves onward to claim his heritage. And worship must also include the sense of dependence and inferiority. We can adequately worship that only which is

beyond our conception. The faith that is in us must peer through the darkness; else it is no faith at all, but knowledge. The plant, developing into perfect beauty, must first grope its way out of the darkness of the earth into the warmth and light of the sun, from which comes the life that is to make it perfect. Man grows towards God, but the god of his worship must be infinite and complete, else humanity stops short of its own possible completeness. Therefore idolatry is a sin not only against the divine but against ourselves; for idolatry is the creation out of our own consciousness of the object of our worship; and that which we can create can never be the infinite. That which we can create we can attain; and our progress must cease at the lower standard. The graven image is that

lesser thing, whether it be graven from wood or stone, or carved only out of human imaginings—the intangible image of creative thought. In the philosophic thought of classic days, men realised that the personified images of their Pantheon were but material representations of psychic facts, and Zeus and Athene and Aphrodite but the embodiments of power and wisdom and love. They understood, too, that each one of these facts was but an attribute of divinity; hence they multiplied their gods in the ever vain attempt to realise infinity from the heaping together of finite elements—vain because the infinite whole is ever greater than the sum of its attributes.

Idolatry, then, is the worship of that which is less than God, whether that lesser divinity be represented by some

phenomenon of nature—as the sun or wind which the savage worships; the graven image of superlative beauty or hideous ugliness, or merely the unembodied conception of human speculation. Idolatry may be even laudable in the untutored savage, representing as it does his aspiration towards the infinite; it is unpardonable in the Christian who professes and believes that God has been revealed to him. Yet within Christianity itself is a Pantheon of idols. So-called Christian doctrine is crowded with false divinities—inadequate conceptions of God, which we ignorantly worship. Human thought has ever busied itself in carving out these graven images, likenesses of things with which we are familiar in human life. Commonest of all is the anthropomorphic God—the God which is a glorified

likeness of humanity. In spite of the fulness of revelation to the contrary, from the intangible Presence in the burning bush to the rushing mighty wind of Pentecost, in spite of the definite declaration of Jesus and the Apostles, despite the unfailing tradition of the Church, there is probably scarcely a human being who would not, if compelled to answer truthfully, confess to holding, or to having at one time or another held, a crudely anthropomorphic conception of God.[1] That is to say, the mind naturally attributes to Deity those characteristics with which it is familiar in humanity. The child thinks of God as a huge man, without bodily substance, indeed, if he has been taught about an infinite Spiiit; but still a shadow-form,

[1] Cp. Prof. John Fiske. *The Idea of God*, p. 117.

almighty and omniscient as the exaggeration of the human characteristics of wisdom and strength. Grown to maturity, the mind may learn to lay aside its fancy of a human figure for its Deity, but only by a supreme effort does it cease to think of God as the Mighty Individual, infinite indeed in wisdom and power, but still the individual ruler of His creation.

This is the most familiar idol in our temple. In one form or another it enters into half the controversies which vex the Church. The failure to distinguish personality from individuality lies at the root of much of the heresy and schism in Christian thought. Catholic theology declares God to be personal; it distinctly denies that He is an individual. That declaration and denial is the express purpose of the one central doctrine

of Christian faith—the Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity is a declaration of the fact that God has revealed Himself as Person, but that the extent of that personality is beyond our human ken. It is the nearest expression which our human powers can attain of the truth of the manifold nature of God. "Three Persons in One God," we say with our lips. "Infinite Personality in One," our spirits answer, following on with that spiritual understanding which is beyond the powers of mind to frame or lips to utter. The Three are the grand general grouping of that infinity of attributes into a form which our trembling tongues can confess. God everywhere, beneath nature, in human hearts, in surging and tumultuous force; God the life of all; and yet that life not impersonal, but the warm pulsing

heart of the universe, perceiving and knowing all in infinite Love.

That is the truth which the central doctrine of Christianity reveals to us. It is what men have tried to express in the term *immanence*, a technical term falling far short of the graphic object-teaching of the Trinity.

But as this infinite personality of God is beyond our mental reach, we yield to the temptation of creating a god which corresponds to our most familiar manifestation of the personal —the individual. And hosts of us who vaunt our doctrinal soundness still worship this idol—the conception of a god who sits apart from the universe which he has created, overseeing and governing it, reading and warning the hearts of his creatures, rewarding and punishing, condemning and redeeming them. It is an

idol of sublime and awful mien; it is not the living God.

Sometimes our idols are more grotesque. There still exist multitudes of worshippers of the image moulded by many hands, but popularly attributed to the genius of Calvin, the image of a god of implacable justice and vengeance, conceived with the logic of genius, a mighty idol, yet perverted and hideous like the horrid deities which fill the temples of the Orient. Or the perfect image of God is mutilated. Men have looked upon but one aspect of the Perfect Form, and, failing to find there that which satisfies their upward longing, have turned about to the sole contemplation of the other side of the divine countenance. Those earnest souls who, failing to appreciate the truth that the infinity of God's nature

must of necessity embrace the human, have seen in Jesus Christ not God, but man alone, are worshipping the idol of an incomplete and mutilated divinity. And the devout who in all ages have made the Divine Presence with man dependent on the sacred formulas and symbols of a priestly order have so placed limitations upon their god that they are but adoring a creature of man's device, noble in its majesty and glory, but less than the Eternal God.

These are but instances of the divers ways in which men fall into idolatry. For only when heart and soul and mind and strength are all employed in the fullest vigour in the worship of God as He has revealed Himself to us do we cease from idols. And since the danger is one which besets in especial the mind—the crea-

tive faculty—the remedy for it lies in the correction of that faculty by instruction and knowledge. To this end exists Catholic doctrine, training the mind in its knowledge of God, as the wise master trains the hand and eye of the young artist lest his unguided talent lead him astray and his art degenerate into caricature.

And yet naught is more misunderstood in purpose and scope than doctrine. Its foes are both within and without its own household. Men chafe beneath it and shrink from it in abhorrence. Why should my soul in its search for truth be hampered and fettered by any system of traditional teaching? Who dares arrest the freedom of the child of God as he would seek his Father? The air is full of questions such as these, and the spirit of individual liberty ap-

plauds the soul's untutored efforts to seek the Infinite. And the counter-spirit rises to meet it—the spirit which assumes that man has no right to let his mind peer into the depths of spiritual truths—that the revelation of God is no direct vision, but only the reflection given back to us from the mirror of dogma which Theology holds before us, in which all must see alike the only image of God which has been vouchsafed to men. Both these opposing points of view are based upon the same misconception. They rest upon the assumption that doctrine is the master of the human soul, not its servant, in its search for truth and God. Like the savage hordes of our Saxon forefathers, who subjugated the very people that had bidden them to their island shores to assist and defend them in the struggle

against their oppressors, the hosts of doctrine arrogantly claim sovereignty over the human soul which they were summoned to aid.

It is a common, perhaps the very commonest, conception of the relation of doctrine to life that God enjoins on us the double standard of right belief and right behaviour. "Thou shalt live the righteous life, the life of obedience to the divine command," is, in this thought, supplemented by the injunction, "Thou shalt believe the true Faith—the Faith of God's arbitrary decree." By this twofold standard are we to be judged, the deeds done in the body side by side with the belief accepted by the mind. We may confidently defy the upholders of such a theory to produce the warrant for their assumption. There can be but one standard by which we are judged

—the standard of a perfect character, the white stone bearing the new name, which is known only to him who receiveth it. But that character, moulding itself amid the environments of our earthly life, must feel the impress of the mind's belief. Right thinking must bear fruit in righteous living.

As the chief object of God's revelation of Himself to man is that man, beholding and adoring, may mould himself into some semblance of the Perfect Life, so the purpose of doctrine is to guide the mind of man towards the true revelation lest it adore and fashion itself after a lesser divinity—an idol of man's device, instead of the One Living and True God. Such a guide has Catholic doctrine ever been, if by the word "Catholic" we mean that which responds to the ancient and familiar test: *Quod semper, quod ubique,*

quod ab omnibus—that which has everywhere, always, and by all been received. For men did not formulate dogma till they saw that other men, wise in their own conceit, sought an idol instead of God. Then, and then only, did the reverent consensus of the faithful erect by the wayside the finger-posts which point the way to Christ, who is the one form in human likeness through whom we may look and behold the Living God.

Far across the Campagna, where "all roads lead to Rome," the eye can see the swelling dome of St. Peter's, bearing its cross aloft. It closes the vision as the highways stretch along the flower-strewn meadows. On each side the road a ditch or wall or hedge marks the line beyond which it is not wise to pass if one's object is to reach the Eternal

City. You may cross those barriers if you will, and, perchance, after wandering in malarial marshes, after retracing your steps and turning again and again on your course, you may at last gain the shadow of that lifted cross. But such is not the safe and sure way. Along the road between its walls and hedges you will surely reach it. In the field you will not find it; nor will you attain it by sitting in the shadow of the hedgerows and measuring their length and height. Pressing onward between them, running your free course along the highway, exerting your own strength, at last you press with your feet the marble floor of the temple of God and lift your eyes upward to the Cross.

Across the spreading fields of life's experiences we see afar the image of

the Christ, "lifted above the earth." Our soul's aspiration bids us press onward towards it. On the one side and the other rise the walls which guard the way thither—the doctrines of the Church's Faith. We may leap them if we choose, and wander amid the fields beyond, but we shall not find Christ there. We may linger by them, and hold fast to them, and say, "How firm and high these doctrines are; see how they stretch on to Christ; cling to them, here is safety." But then some day we shall awaken to find that others who have made no such fetich of them have passed us by as we linger there in our self-satisfaction. But if we see in those doctrines but the barriers which bound the way that leads us to Christ, and, venturing not to cross them, press with our God-given powers along the road they

mark, then surely we shall come, each one in our own endeavour, to the feet of Christ, and, lifting our eyes to His face, shall see therein the Vision of the Eternal God.

Individuality

THERE is a vital significance in the different accounts which the Evangelists give of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. Though they vary in extent and in detail, yet one purpose seems to underlie them all—to set forth the truth that the Messiah came, not as a meteor-flash across the sky, but only in the fulness of time and as the inspired fruit of long continued growth. This is one of the vital truths of all revelation, and yet it is one for which science, rightly named, contends against religion, falsely so called. One of the most grievous errors into which the unthinking believer in a divine reve-

lation is prone to fall is that such revelation runs counter to the established principles of development. To him miracle is an overturning rather than a transcending of natural law; the vision of God is hidden from the eyes of the present age, and vouchsafed only at special seasons, at rare intervals, and through a stay in the ordinary processes of nature and creation; and the Christ is an isolated Being in human history, an oasis in the desert of the world's life. No wonder that a philosophy such as this is at variance with the discoveries and decrees of science, which stand in reverent awe before the infinite moderation and progressive order of the creative process, as written on the face of creation itself.

But the faithful believer who reads his Bible in the large as a record of

God's revelation in the lives and history of His children realises that the same truth is no less clearly set forth therein. Though there may appear here and there on sacred pages traces of the same human failure to understand God's way of making Himself known, yet in its whole the Bible records the revelation of God as a slowly-moving development of the increasing purpose which runs through the ages. The rhythmic movement of the Creation story in Genesis sounds the keynote of this revelation. It rings throughout Old Testament history. The Children of Israel make no sudden break away from captivity. Only after long and repeated warnings, and plague after plague visiting the heads of the oppressors, at last they make their way out of Egypt, and then long years of wandering prepare

the slaves of former time to be the conquerors and possessors of the Promised Land. So sacred history moves on. As in all history, each epoch leads to the next, and effect comes only after its right and proper cause. The great Event of all is no exception, as the Evangelists plainly show. The Perfect Man, in whom dwelt the fulness of the Godhead bodily, was the fruitage of the land in which He lived, the people of Jehovah, the lineage of David. Nowhere but in Judæa could the Wonder Child be born; He could spring from no race save the God-fearing line of David, exalted by its reverent consciousness that it was one day to bring forth the Saviour of Man; and only, we may believe, from the unstained soul of the Virgin Mother could He arise who should be

tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Thus through all the ages since man's first disobedience had God been preparing the way for the production of the Perfect Man who should be the Incarnation of God. This truth the Evangelists seek to impress upon us in their records of genealogy and their careful tracing of the fulfilment of prophecy. The Christ, offspring of David, child of the pure Virgin, was born in Bethlehem because only thus and there and from such parentage could He come forth. Each person in the long line of His human ancestry, each locality in his environment, each link in the chain of circumstances contributed its own individual part in the Messiah's coming.

All along the highways of Judæa, in the year of our Lord's birth, were journeying families of the Children of

Israel in obedience to an Imperial decree. The command for the enrollment of the inhabitants of this province had gone forth from Cæsar. In accordance with Rome's tactful policy of deference to the prejudices of her subject peoples, each family was bidden to go to its ancestral home to be numbered, as was Jewish custom, by clans and houses. Therefore each household went its own individual way, and in that way fulfilled the common end. So it came to pass that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, as was spoken by the prophet. Such is always the seeming anomaly of the divine process. The common weal, the common advancement, is achieved through the development of individuals in their pursuit of a common purpose.

Individuality is an essential element in the structure of Christian character.

Individuality

There can be scarcely a more serious reminder of our duty than the thought that each soul in God's household has its own place and its peculiar mission. Of the countless millions of the Children of the Father that have peopled the earth and will inhabit it till time shall be no more, no one has ever been the exact counterpart of you or me. We may find abundant similarities between us in natural gifts, or inherited traits, or influences of estate and circumstance; but in the infinity of changes of combination of them all is found the truth of Individuality, which separates every soul from its fellows or its forerunners in the economy of the divine plan. However small or great, therefore, each human life has its own place, which no other can fill. An indispensable unit in the series, an indispensable link in the chain, each

human soul has to answer to God for the fulfilment of its trust, the keeping of its charge. The trust is the individual equipment; the fulfilment is its development. Such is Nature's example; and because Nature is the direct reflection of the divine energy, its example is the best at hand for our observance. There is a wondrous unity in Nature as we know it. The types of landscapes which present themselves to the traveller are but few, and these divided by no very distinct boundary lines. The Tropic and the Temperate, woodland and meadowland and desert—these, and a few with them, constitute all the marked variations of Nature's plan as we roam over the earth. Stand some summer morning on a hillside and let the eye wander over the view before it. It is one sweep of green—the

vivid green of the sward against the deeper hue of grove and forest. But go down amid that mass of grass and leaf, and what was the monotony of unity becomes the variety of individuality. Of the millions of blades of grass that blend to form the meadow, no two are alike. Each leaf which trembles on the branches bears some distinguishing characteristic which separates it from every one of its fellows through all the forest. Child of its own environment, it lives its own existence, pressing outward and upward towards the sunlight which gives it life.

This example of Nature is more than an analogy. It is the counterpart of humanity's ideal, the revelation, through God's unconscious creation, of what He expects of us, to whom He has given the power of

responsibility and initiative. Children of our environment and our heritage, we serve God by seeking Him as the grass and flower and leaf seek the sunlight. And in that seeking of God, in the common purpose which lifts us upward, the characteristics of individuality with which we are endowed become more emphasised and developed, and we are identities merged together in the constraining love of Christ.

For that love is the power which differentiates Christian individuality from the individuality of self. The world gives constant evidence of lives which wax strong and independent in their own self-seeking, and in their conquering march leave the wayside strewn with the forms of their victims. Constrained by the singleness of selfish purpose such lives press forward towards its

attainment, reckless of the ruin which their course entails. The Christian's individuality, that which makes each soul in the Christ-fellowship a master soul, bears the stamp, not of self, but of Christ; not of ambition, but of love. And its onward course spreads not ruin, but blessing, and breathes an aroma of that love which is its constraining power.

But it is an individuality no less strong. The runner in the course, who speeds onward to win the laurel crown, is no less strong an athlete than the prize-fighter who maims his opponent with brutal thrust to gain a money prize. And his strength is the echo of the open air and bright sunlight, of glad throngs and joyous acclamations; while the other's mien speaks but of foul night air and cursing crowds and sullen concealment.

So in the soul's strength, the individuality of self is sullen and brutal, and within doors; the individuality of the constraining love of Christ is in the open sunlight. The power of self strengthens by developing the worst that is in us; the power of Christ brings forth the best. The one trains the spiritual muscles for the prize ring; the other for the stadium. We can all recall from among our own acquaintance instances of marked individuality of these opposing types. There is the character whom we fear, whose will we shrink from opposing. It is far simpler to yield to it than to stir the sleeping lion beneath, and it wins its way by the strength of its closeset purpose. There is the other character, whom we love. It opposes us with no selfish purpose, and yet we are glad to yield to it because its desire

is for the attainment of that which brings blessings; and it wins its way, which we learn is our own best way also. There can be no union of individualities of the self type. Gather them together and they are but a collection of units, each sufficient unto itself, at variance one with another. But those individualities, which are made strong by love's constraining power, unite by virtue of their common purpose, as the blades of grass, each strengthening its individuality in its aspiration towards the sunlight, merge in the community of the greensward.

There, then, is the true Christian unity. "That they may be one, even as we are." Religious thought has always recognised that unity is the ideal of Christian brotherhood, and many are the devices by which it has

sought to gain it. The error of them all is the idea that unity can be gained by running every character in the same mould and losing individuality in uniformity. To this end men have devised the mould of conduct, by which Christians are to be fashioned alike through a stated set of enjoined or prohibited practices. The Christian is to be known as such if he refrains from such amusements as the code of conduct has placed under its ban, or rigorously follows its prescribed fastings and observances. We are familiar with it in this commonplace modern form known as Puritanism, as the early Christians were familiar with it in the persons of those who demanded of each new convert that he "be circumcised and obedient to the law of Moses."

And there is the still more familiar

and universal mould by which men have thought to compel unity—the mould of Orthodoxy. Since thought is the mainspring of action, let us compel men to think alike. The very result of this endeavour sufficiently indicates whether it is adequate to its purpose. The wars and jealousies of sects and factions, the grievous rents in the robe of Christ, are evidence that neither compulsory conduct nor compulsory belief can unite men. For the one is but the outward form; the other is impossible of attainment. No endeavour could be more hopeless than the attempt to coerce men to hold the same views of truth. The very infinity of truth itself precludes the uniformity. Two friends who side by side stand looking at the glory of a sunset sky see different visions of its golden and rosy hues spread along the

western heavens. Each observer sees those tints and shades and combinations which his own personal equipment fits him to perceive. So in the vision of God. No two human minds need ever hope to see the same aspects of His Eternal Truth. That Truth is the same—unchangeable, eternal, infinite. To each one of His children it is revealed in the mode in which He has fitted us to receive it, and in our turn to reveal it to those who stand by our side in life's course.

For that revelation of God through the lives and thoughts of His children, continuing in infinite variety so long as time endures, is our high calling. From the surface of the rippled ocean beneath the morning sun which has risen in its glory is given back the answering glitter of millions of sparkling points; no two identical, yet all merging to-

gether in a new revelation of that sun's beauty and glory. And the Sun of Righteousness, once for all risen above the waves of human experience, has its new revelation, reflected back from the infinitely changing sea of human characters, mingling their individualities in the Light of His countenance.

In the unspeakable dignity of this high calling, may we not once for all cease to measure our fellow-beings by the standard of our own particular view of the Truth of God; and in that love which, because it springs from a pure heart, is the vision of God, let our individualities unite in revealing His Being and His Truth? That is the mission of the Church of God which is the fellowship of infinitely varying characters; each one, constrained by the love of Christ, seeking

that Truth which makes men free, and in that unity of love revealing it to the world.

Be ourselves, then! It is God's appointed way towards peace and unity among His children. Live our own lives, develop our own individualities. For the true life and the true individuality is the Christ Life. The natural man may go astray, indeed, and the sins of the fathers be visited upon the children from generation to generation, till it seem as if the only tendency of humanity is to do evil, and the bidding, "Be yourself!" signify only to be sinful and selfish. But back of this inheritance is the heritage from God the Father—the heritage of the perfect man, manifested in Christ Jesus. Constrained by the love of this Figure, which is our true self, our separate individual

lives will develop in their beauty and their strength, casting aside that which is of our false and sinful heritage, "till we all come, in the unity of the Faith, and of the Knowledge of the Son of God, unto the Perfect Man, of the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

Inspired vision has portrayed the occupation of the saints in Paradise as the chanting of an eternal hymn, amid the accompaniment of harps of gold, of praise to the Most High. Is not the interpretation of the vision the harmony of those countless millions of individual lives, each sounding its own note; yet all by the divine love held in perfect accord—an infinite symphony around the Throne of God?

Consecration

THE watchword of the Christian life, that which sums up all other characteristics, is Consecration. And yet that which it denotes is so subtle a thing that the definition of it is hard to find. Its presence is as when on a gray winter morning we walk abroad and all around us the snow lies in its dull monotony of white. Overhead the sky is leaden, and against its lifeless background gaunt branches of naked trees are weirdly outlined. An hour passes, and the snow-clad earth, lying beneath a sky of deepest blue, gives back the sunlight in a glitter of sparkling gems. There is no change in

the contour of the landscape, it is the same scene in all its commonplace details; but into it has come a new light, a new splendour, a new glory. It is the same world, and yet a new world, resplendent with the beauty of light. So in the human soul—Life is a monotony of commonplace details. To comparatively few is it given to rise far above their level; few, comparatively, sink into awful depths. But into the midst of any such life there may come, as the sunlight bursts into the winter world, a transforming splendour. That is consecration—life's resplendent commonplace. Rather than any change in the form of life, it is a change in its mode.

One morning our Lord appeared to His disciples when they had been passing the night in unsuccessful toil in their fishing boats. Seeing their

weariness and disappointment, He spoke with authority, "Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught." Instantly the answer came from the disciple whose action never was wanting: "Master, we have toiled all the night, and taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net." That was the reply of the consecrated soul. It might have been inspiring after those weary night hours if the Master had bidden them do some new thing. To leave their boats, and in spiritual ecstasy to gather around Him while He prayed the Father, and then to watch the sea, beneath His miraculous touch, give forth its harvest. Or to turn away from their labour altogether, as when their first call came to be "fishers of men," and to go forth with Him preaching the gospel of the Kingdom,

or sent two by two to heal the sick. But He bade them do none of these things, only to turn again to their toil and cast again their net where they had all night laboured in vain. There was little of inspiration in that, little to kindle a passionate devotion and awaken their wearied frames to glad endeavour. But because the Master bade it, a new life came into their toil; its commonplace routine was illumined by a new vision; and their labour, thus consecrated by willing obedience, found its reward in the wondrous draught of fishes. We have not often such a visible reward to prove to us the potency of consecrated toil, but otherwise the analogy is very close. To toil on where we have been disappointed, because the Master bids it, is the key-note of consecration.

No wonder that in such a subtle thing we long for an outward sign. Surely, we argue, the life to which God calls us must be so alienated from the life of sin and the world that the line of their demarcation is sharp and clear. What experience is there, what evidence to our consciousness, when we have crossed that line? In attempted answer to this question has arisen the fiction of conversion—a conscious "change of heart" as the entrance gate from the worldly to the Christian life. Such an experience is indeed a genuine and familiar one, when the self-life is awakened from its torpor or when the vision of the higher life presents itself to emotional natures; but it can be but a mistake to think that the experience, which may come many times in a single life, or may be utterly wanting from it, can make the

point at which, once for all, we pass out from the life of the world to the life of Christ.

Or we magnify the meaning of the regeneration which comes in baptism. Whatever Baptismal Regeneration signifies, it certainly does not mean that through it there is an actual and definite change in the nature and constitution of the human soul. Baptism is not the outward sign of a transformed character in the sense that the cool and moistened palm is the outward sign that the system is no longer racked with fever. It is precisely because Consecration is so subtle a thing, so unattended by definite overturning, that the sacrament of Baptism is given us, to reveal to us the coming of the Holy Spirit, from whom proceeds the inspiration to consecrate our lives. It is the divine assurance that God

has called us from uncleanness to holiness; that He has bidden us burst through the clouds which cast their gray pall over our life's monotonous duties with the sunlight which makes them radiant.

And such an assurance is needful to us. Happy indeed is the child of God who can feel a distinct call to serve the divine will. He who has a definite mission in any department of human activity is doubly blessed, even as he is doubly responsible. The youth who knows that he must write or paint or sing can but rejoice in that unmistakable conviction, even though he is conscious that it means suffering and self-denial and sorrow. And the soul who, like St. Paul, knows that not to preach the Gospel were but woe, can but rejoice in the tribulations and stripes and distresses and

imprisonments which must attend its course, as a part of the definite labour which it is called to perform. The voices which called Joan of Arc meant sorrow, but they were unmistakable.

But to most of us such calls do not come. As most of us are not the vessels of genius, so most of us are not marked for a career of special spiritual exaltation. And yet the career of a spiritual life is laid upon every one of us. To do all that we can with the powers that we have for Him who gave them to us is our mission. That is the consecrated life, to which the sign in Baptism is our call. Not to change but to develop along the line and in the estate wherein we are, so performing our daily duties that they make, not for worldliness but for godliness, is the consecrated life. In a word, it is the life that now is touched

with the glow of the life immortal. And to enter into it we must learn to see life in its true perspective, as part and parcel of the existence whose foundations are laid in eternity.

When the plant has first started its tiny shoots forth from the seed, it sends some into the depths, and some into the freedom of the upper air. Grown into the tree, it lives in those two elements. Down into the depths of the soil below it sends its roots, gnarled and twisted, finding their way amid buried rock and ledge, where they may draw their nourishment from the cool moist earth. Above, the trunk soars high, spreading wide its branches, bursting into foliage, gathering air and sunlight and rain. Distinct as are these parts of the tree, living in different elements, yet in their life they are one, interdependent

one on another for their existence. The sap comes upwards from those hidden roots into the lofty branches, and back to the roots again it bears the nourishment from the outer world.

So it is in our human life. In the darkness of this present world there is not revealed to us the glory of the life eternal; and yet that glory sends its rays down into our darkness, because it is a part of one and the same life. Familiar phraseology divides the life that now is from the life that is to come. Our highest thought is too apt to be merely that the present life is a preparation for the life of eternity. The better we live here, the better are we fitted to take up the life which awaits us when we have passed through a change we call death.

But in reality there is no such distinction. There is but one life—and

that which is present is in vital and organic connection with that which is by and by, as much as the tree's gnarled roots are in vital and organic connection with its shimmering foliage. Whatever makes for the welfare of the one must inevitably include the welfare of the other. It is a simple and universal law. The life of this world is not a thing apart, but in vital union with the life of the world to come. That which we call worldliness is but the lopping off from the whole tree of one of its roots or one of its branches, a process which in the end must cause the death of the separated portion. Thus it is that men build for success in this life, setting the goal of endeavour below the surface of the earth, and taking no account of that portion of our life which grows in the sunlight and air.

But the true philosophy of existence is that which sees life's whole and labours for it, realising that nothing counts for gain save that which furthers the growth of the whole. The seeming success of the hour may too often be the death warrant of real success, and the seeming failure be but a step in the process of life's eternal whole. As the gardener may produce a flower of mammoth size and gorgeous colouring and perfect form which yet is sterile, because its energies have been given to producing petal rather than fruit, thus the soul may so give its energies to the perfection of that which is present that when in time's brief course that droops and dies, no vitality remains for its perpetuation. To neglect any phase of the infinite whole of life is to violate the Creator's will. The cloistered monk

who shirks the duties and trials which beset the present, and the world-fettered soul which neglects the spiritual impulses that link us to eternity alike fail in the calling to which we are summoned. Christ's own prayer: "not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil," sums up our mission. We must be in the world, meet its temptations and disappointments and sufferings, enjoy its pleasures, use its good gifts, exercise our bodies and cultivate our minds, delight in friends and family, bear the taunts of enemies,—this must we do, and not leave the other undone. Into the midst of our worldly life must enter that which "keeps from the evil." It is that which does not permit temptation to conquer us, or sorrow to harden, or pain to benumb us; which

will not let pleasure engross or sense enthrall; but which so adjusts and fashions all these things that they make for eternity and form an integral part of the infinite whole of life's immortal course. The life into which this spirit has entered is the consecrated life.

Memory recalls a weary day of train riding through a monotonous French landscape. Now and then, as it approached its close, were visible mountain peaks in the distance, snow capped and glacier bound. Then there came a moment of darkness as the train sped through a tunnel; and with returning light, the eye saw beneath, amid an emerald setting of vineyards, the blue lake of poem and story. The ice-peaks lifted themselves beyond, their whiteness touched with the rose of evening. Instinctively the

glance turned towards the companions in travel. They were the same, friends and strangers, who had shared all day the commonplace accommodations of the railway carriage. The train was still plodding on as before, its monotonous rumble varied only by the shrill shriek of the engine. Yet into all a new life had entered; the fair vision of that Alpine land had swept away all the tedium and monotony of the journey. And when in the midst of life's way, we lift up our eyes unto the hills from whence cometh our help, the tedium and weariness vanishes, and all the present world is suffused with light which comes from the vision of the Celestial Country.

Such, then, is Consecration. It is that distant view of the City of God illumining but not altering the circumstances of our daily life. The

consecrated life is the inspired life. He who reads the pages of the sacred Scriptures of the Old Testament, finds the inspiration which breathes through them not so much in isolated events or wonder stories as in the fact that the whole history of a people is told from the point of view of their relation with Jehovah. Laying bare to the searching light of criticism and analysis all their faults and weaknesses and sins, it still shows the moving onward of a people whose great dominating purpose was to seek and serve God.

And the true inspiration of human lives is not in those prophetic moments when in exalted ecstasy we see God face to face; but in the whole history of each individual soul whose dominating purpose is God's service. There are weary hours when it seems

as if He hid His face; many hours when self is dominant and sin is easier than righteousness. Yet again and again the veil is lifted and the pilgrim sees afar the Delectable Mountains; and through that vision the wandering footsteps are strengthened and the lost ways regained. The very slips and falls of sin and self are made vantage points to gain the heights. For:

"Men may rise on stepping stones
Of their dead selves to higher things."

And that blessed thing which can deaden ourselves, which can make even sin serve righteousness, and transform the worldly life into the life of the other world, which can infuse and illumine the commonplace till it becomes transcendent with holiness, is Consecration.

The Life Eternal

THOSE factors in our experience which are most familiar to us are often the most mysterious. After all the world's experience with light and heat, who knows exactly what they are? We are masters to-day of the subtle force which our savage ancestors worshipped, and which was but a wonder and a terror among the phenomena of nature even to our civilised forefathers; yet, though we talk glibly enough of "electric fluid," who knows what it is, whether fluid, or matter at all, or abstract force? The most familiar experience of all, the great reality of existence, is the most mysterious,—

life. We know not what it is. Save by our faith in a divine revelation, which tells us of God's breathing of it into His completed creation, we know not whence it comes. Yet we know well when it is present. Experience teaches even the least observant among us to distinguish between the organic and the inorganic—between that which is inert and acted upon by the great impersonal life without, and that which of itself acts, initiates, thinks. When life departs is the darkest and greatest mystery of all. And yet there are few who do not witness this mystery, none who are not to experience it.

We distinguish, also, between the various grades of life. It is a far cry from the primitive cell to the complex organism of man; from the unheeding life of bivalve or mollusc to

the self-conscious, thinking being. Along the way between the two are ranged the manifold forms which constitute life, and yet vary almost as much one from the other as life from death or matter from spirit. And in life's highest realm as we know it our very nomenclature indicates that we recognise a multiplicity of variations, departments and grades. We speak of savage life and civilised life, social, intellectual, moral life. All these indicate that life is not merely existence. Rather is the conclusion forced upon us that that which has its beginning in mere existence, is like all else in creation struggling, winning its way upward to its consummation in life itself in its real and completed form. In other words, the final purpose of the groan and travail of the creative process is

the bringing forth of eternal life. Existence — the crude and nascent form of life—has its seat throughout nature; but the life eternal dwells only in human character. It is the highest and noblest phase of the evolutionary process, its glory and crown. To attain it, life has struggled upward through the stages of the unconscious to the conscious and self-conscious, till it has developed the intellectual and the social. From the intellectual and social it has developed moral and ethical life, and has touched and quickened these with religion. And standing on this highest plane of life's present attainment, humanity, the heir of all the ages, is bidden press onward to the gaining of the supreme goal of the course of evolution—the life eternal.

We have, in an earlier chapter,

spoken of the familiar truism in the great story of Development, that when the mastery is gained over any new endeavour, it becomes the possession and heritage of the race. There are many faculties, the exercise of which is instinctive and involuntary. We inherit existence, consciousness, the power of thought, the faculty of speech. Because we have no record of the time when these things were in the winning, we assume that they were from the beginning bestowed upon us and our forefathers as a gift —an endowment. If certain of these powers are in the keeping of higher forms of creation, it has been assumed that these higher species were independently created and sent into the world with their complete quota of gifts, which may never be multiplied, but only employed and strength-

ened. But one of the great lessons of the modern doctrine of development through the survival of the fittest, is the thought that whatever powers are in the possession of the race to-day have become ours by the bitter struggles of individuals in the long course of our ancestry, back to life's remotest beginnings.

And in the winning of the last great victory in the creative struggle, we have before us as individuals no less bitter and strenuous a contest. If in the lower stages the struggle for advancement was involuntary or instinctive, with us it becomes definite and voluntary. We are distinctly called to the effort to win eternal life. Towards that effort the education and training of the race has tended through the centuries. It has been the purpose of the religions of the world. It

is distinctly stated by Christ as the meaning of His mission. "I am come that they might have life"—not as plants and animals and cruder man has it—but "more abundantly." So also, in loving vehemence St. Paul appeals to Timothy: "Lay hold on eternal life." We recognise it in our universal confession of faith as something for which we are distinctly and strenuously struggling: "I believe in the life everlasting." Not the life which we inherited at our birth—the taking of the breath, the beating of the heart. We need no effort of faith to assure us of this. It would be a manifest absurdity to incorporate such a declaration in the formula which represents our faith—the soul's high endeavour. We *know* that we have life in the lower sense, but we *believe in* the life everlasting. It is that for the attainment

of which we put forth our highest strength. The life eternal is not given to the race as the powers of thought and speech are bestowed upon it. Because we are inheritors of the life that now is, it does not of necessity follow that we are inheritors of the life eternal.

For eternal life is not merely indefinitely continued existence. As civilised life differs from savage life, and the reasoning life of man differs from the unthinking existence of the brute, so eternal life differs from all that goes before it in that into it a new element has entered—the element of self-mastery, of overcoming, of all which goes to make that which we call character. For it is character alone that is immortal. As the flower of creation is the human character, as it is that which the æons of evolution have

struggled to produce, so it is that which alone can enter into the inheritance of the life eternal. "He that overcometh shall inherit all things." We cannot predicate immortality to him into whose life this element has not entered. He "cometh up and is cut down like a flower." His existence may be rich with the fruitage of that which has gone before him. Physical beauty, the wealth of goods, the riches of a cultured mind, trained thought, philosophy, science, may be his. But these things are all of the existence which "fleeth as it were a shadow." They have prepared the way towards character. But only when into them enters the element which makes for the "white stone" can he who possesses them become inheritor of eternal life.

And yet we appeal to those things

which are our inheritance from the past when we would assure ourselves of the existence of the life to come. We appeal to instinct as an assurance of immortality. It is in our nature, we say. We long for it. The thought of labour incomplete, of lives cut short in the strength of their career, of affections broken off, of friends whom we have loved borne from our sight —all these things speak to us of a life eternal in which must be wrought out those purposes and consummated those endeavours which are left unfinished here. In very truth they thus speak to us. Even so ambition speaks to the youth of great achievement. It tells him truly of the possibilities of greatness which lie before him. But unless the voice of ambition is answered by strenuous endeavour, the youth will spend his life-

time in dreams which will never be realised. Likewise, we must supplement our instincts of immortality with the endeavour to win it—with the creation of that which bears within it the germs of the eternal life.

So, also, we appeal to revelation. The Bible assures us of immortality. In St. John's glorious vision, the life of the blessed saints in their eternal abode is the glowing theme. More than all, the Resurrection of Christ brought immortality to light. And yet revelation is but the guide to that which we are to win. Many a man may read descriptions of fair lands beyond the seas, may converse with those who have travelled there, till his mind is stored with the pictures of those scenes which he hopes one day to visit. But year after year passes, and he makes no effort to turn

his footsteps thither, till at last his vision perishes with him, and he knows not the thrill which may fill the senses of him who stands at last in the country of his dreams.

Christ indeed revealed immortality. Not only has He told us of it, but He has shown us the steps whereby we are to gain it. But it is not ours merely because He brought it to light. He has revealed it to us that our belief in it may be confirmed. It is ours to win, and He has manifested to us the means whereby we may win it. We stand, then, as co-workers with God in His supreme act of creation. Through the fierce struggle of individual souls is to be wrought out that for which creation has travailed. We win for ourselves eternal life, and each victory is one step onward towards the final mastery when immortality

shall be our universal inheritance, as the power to breathe and to think and to love is our natural heritage to-day. Some day perhaps the life eternal shall be the endowment of every soul without struggle, without distinct endeavour. To-day it is in the winning, as every endowment of the race has been won by the struggle of individuals, in which those who have been strong to conquer have survived. That is the Christian warfare, the Christian coöperation with God in His creative process.

Let this be the message of Christianity to the men of to-day. It is the higher interpretation of the lower appeal for the "saving of the soul"—the winning of life. Let us substitute the higher for the lower thought. It frees us from the idea that we are slaves under the lash of the taskmas-

ter, and reveals us to ourselves as fellow-workers with Christ under the stimulus of opportunity. Mediævalism spread before the mind a picture of eternal torment. Beneath the lash of fear it sought to goad the soul to take to itself those elements which create character, and therefore make for immortality. But if out from mediæval darkness we are able to-day to see something of the light which flooded the souls of those who lived in the twilight of Christ's immediate presence, we can substitute something of the motive which inspired them. St. Paul's message to his beloved Timothy was not to flee eternal torment, but to lay hold on eternal life. In the stress of that motive we build for an eternity of achievement. Intelligently we recognise our part, and with fidelity and consecration seek to

fulfil it. With the vigour of zeal and faith which sent our ancestors across the seas to win a virgin continent, a precious heritage for their children's children, we set our face to the winning of that which is to be the priceless possession of generations to come, the life eternal, the universal immortality of mankind.

And this understanding of our place in the winning of the life eternal can give an illumination of hope to brighten all our simplest acts, and reveal a new meaning in our personal duties. A thought which tends to discourage us in our attempts to win the Christian mastery, and which serves likewise as an excuse for our failures, is their transitoriness:—What will it matter, a generation hence, whether I succeed or fail in my attempts towards righteousness, whether

I build or wreck my personal character? But since each step in personal character-building is a step towards mankind's final heritage, each single victory leaves its influence on perpetual generations. A sense, not of our insignificance, but of our supreme importance as individual links in the vast chain of the creative process must sweep over us as we view the relation of our personal struggles to humanity's supreme attainment.

In the same mode was answered the Psalmist's question of old: "What is man that Thou art mindful of him?" The question is echoed in many a Christian thought: "Why should God care for my soul that He should redeem it?" Is it not a thought of supreme selfishness that we should be called upon to labour for the salvation of our own souls? But when, in

place of this motive, is substituted the infinitely larger ideal of the winning of eternal life for all humanity as the final creative triumph, and realise that it cannot be achieved without our individual coöperation, we have not only a conception which seems worthy of the infinite mind of God, but we learn that our individual immortality comes to us as the reward of our striving for this ideal consummation. Through personal character shall be won eternal life, and that life is shared by those who struggle for it while it is in the winning. Our forefathers who by their toil and contest in winning their own liberation won for us a continent, are sharers with us in the great life of the empire which they founded here. And as their great gift to us lay in the fact that they did not sit dreaming of the land beyond the

ocean, but rather by their labour and industry laid in their own day the foundations of the nation, so our gift to our heirs is not in the dream or hope of immortality, but in the creation of it: not in that alone we *believe in* the life everlasting, but that we *lay hold* on eternal life.

The one thought seems to push the life eternal into the future; the other links and incorporates it with the life that now is. In modern engineering, it is a familiar feat for an old railway bridge to be replaced by a new and stronger one, without interfering with traffic, or hindering the progress of the trains of a mighty system. The building occupied by a great daily newspaper was, a few years since, replaced by a modern "fireproof" structure without suspending a single edition of the journal. While still the

daily work of publication was going on, the walls of the new building were rising, constructed to endure. Little by little the old and unsubstantial gave place to the new and permanent.

Thus the creation of the life eternal enters into and abides among the occupations and processes of the present life. While we work and play, little by little our employments are transferred from the basis of the life which is transitory to that of the life which is eternal. When, by mastery, by endurance, by consecration, we have so transformed the framework in which life's vocations and recreations find their habitat that it consists of the elements which endure, we learn that the life eternal is not that to be awaited in hope, but that on which we lay hold now, if we will, and into which, however imperfectly, we may enter

to-day. For the difference between present life and eternal life, between earthly life and heavenly life is not a difference of time, perhaps not even a difference of occupation, but a difference of motive and purpose—the difference between that which is so wrought that it endures for an hour and then fades away, and that which is so ordered by consecrated endeavour that it shall abide for ever.

To sum it all: Life, which in the beginning is mere existence, has become so enriched in the course of evolution that this is but a fragment of its complex meaning. It is now in the process of attaining its highest development—immortality. This can be won only through human character, which consists in the mastery over self by the higher spiritual forces, as manifested in Christ, who brought im-

mortality to light. As we develop this Christlike character we enter into the life eternal, which when physical death shall sweep all else away, must abide. This is the true salvation of the soul—the winning of eternal life through character. And as we gain it for ourselves we are adding our part to the heritage to be left to posterity, to be their possession won by our struggles—of life eternal for all mankind.

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FOSTER, John McGaw.
AUTHOR

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